THE SCHOOL MANAGER FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE SCHOOLING OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

O GESTOR ESCOLAR FRENTE AOS DESAFIOS DA ESCOLARIZAÇÃO DOS ALUNOS COM DEFICIÊNCIA VISUAL

EL DIRECTOR DE LA ESCUELA ANTE LOS RETOS DE LA ESCOLARIZACIÓN DE LOS ALUMNOS CON DISCAPACIDAD VISUAL

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the results of the data analysis of the Master's dissertation "The School Manager Facing the Challenges of the Schooling of Students with visual impairment", whose objective was to analyze the importance of the role of the school manager in the articulation of public educational policies aimed at students with visual impairment, investigating the challenges and showing some possibilities. The methodology chosen to carry out the research was Ethnography. The subjects of this research were the school managers of two schools in the municipality of Colatina (ES), one a state school and one a municipal school. The following instruments were used to reach the desired results: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. As a result, it was possible to observe that school managers face many challenges for the schooling of students with visual impairment, however the greatest difficulty concerns the training of teachers and school managers themselves and Democratic Management is very important for the schooling process of public students of Special Education.

KEYWORDS: School Administration. Special Education. Training of Education Professionals and Public Policies.

RESUMO: O presente artigo é a apresentação dos resultados da análise de dados da dissertação de Mestrado “O gestor escolar frente aos desafios da escolarização dos alunos com deficiência visual”, cujo objeto foi analisar a importância da atuação do gestor escolar na articulação das políticas públicas educacionais direcionadas aos estudantes com deficiência visual, investigando os desafios e mostrando algumas possibilidades. A metodologia escolhida para a realização da pesquisa foi a Etnografia. Os sujeitos desta pesquisa foram os gestores escolares de duas escolas do município de Colatina (ES), sendo uma escola estadual e outra municipal. Para se chegar aos resultados pretendidos, foram utilizados os instrumentos: observação participante e entrevistas semiestruturadas. Como resultado, foi possível observar que os gestores escolares enfrentam muito desafios para a escolarização dos alunos com deficiência visual, entretanto a maior dificuldade, diz respeito à formação dos professores e dos próprios gestores escolares e a Gestão Democrática é muito importante para o processo de escolarização dos alunos público da Educação Especial.

RESUMEN: En este artículo se presentan los resultados del análisis de datos de la tesis de maestría "El gestor escolar frente a los retos de la escolarización de estudiantes con discapacidad visual", cuyo objetivo fue analizar la importancia del rol del gestor escolar en la articulación de políticas educativas públicas dirigidas a estudiantes con deficiencia visual, indagando en los retos y mostrando algunas posibilidades. La metodología elegida para llevar a cabo la investigación fue la Etnografía. Los sujetos de esta investigación fueron los directores escolares de dos escuelas del municipio de Colatina (ES), una escuela estatal y una escuela municipal. Para alcanzar los resultados deseados, se utilizaron los siguientes instrumentos: observación participante y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Como resultado, se pudo observar que los directivos escolares enfrentan muchos desafíos para la escolarización de los estudiantes con discapacidad visual, sin embargo, la mayor dificultad se refiere a la formación de los propios docentes y directivos escolares y la Gestión Democrática es muy importante para el proceso de escolarización de los estudiantes públicos de Educación Especial.


Introduction

In the context of Brazilian public education, marked by precariousness, struggles, and hopes, we highlight the figure of the school manager as a leader capable of mobilizing the school community through their knowledge of educational public policies. Further problematizing this role's importance, we emphasize this actor's pedagogical work in schooling and access to knowledge for visually impaired students, a public that requires resources, inclusive practices, and specific materials for their visual acuity.

In this sense, the reflection we will make on the role of the school manager in the schooling process of visually impaired students is related to a social conception of disability, wherein "the task of education consists of introducing the blind child to life and creating compensation for their physical inadequacy. The task is to ensure that the change in social connection with life is led along a different path" (VIGOTSKI, 2021, p. 30, our translation).

We argue in our reflections that the visually impaired student is capable of learning, like other students, through alternative pathways. Emphasizing that, for this student to access content, it is necessary to create enlargements and delineations of alternative pathways that ensure the student's access to the knowledge transmitted by the school. It is in this context that the work of the school manager proves to be so important, as an actor capable of driving inclusive practices and involving the school community in this process.
In this sense, the present work aims to analyze the importance of the school manager's role in articulating educational public policies directed toward students with visual impairments, investigating the challenges, and showing some possibilities. We organized the text in a way that, first, we present to the reader the methodological approach used in the research; then, we describe the analyses of participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted with the two school managers; shortly after, we present the analysis we conducted of the documents from the analyzed schools.

**Research pathways**

To understand daily life and the challenges faced by school managers, a closer look is necessary to immerse oneself in reality. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1994, p. 48, our translation), "Qualitative researchers frequent the study sites because they care about the context. They understand that actions can be better understood when observed in the usual environment of occurrence."

Therefore, a closer, more sensitive look at this complex daily life, which is the interior of a public school, is necessary. The focus of the research is on describing the practices, challenges, and paths adopted by school managers in the schooling process of students with visual impairments. Thus, we used a qualitative ethnographic approach, since "ethnography is also seen as richer in details than other types of research, with more possibilities to reveal implications that can be used to improve education" (MOREIRA; CALEFFE, 2008, p. 89, our translation).

The ethnographer researcher does not only research the school but researches "in the school," and to achieve results in this sense, the research took place in two public schools in the city of Colatina, one from the municipal network and the other from the state education network. A criterion used for the selection of schools was the fact that they enrolled students with visual impairments. The following instruments were used: participant observation and semi-structured interviews, recorded in audio format and transcribed later on.

We chose to use semi-structured interviews in order to start from a protocol that includes the themes to be discussed, but at the same time, the interviewer was free to let the interviewees develop the questions in the way they wanted. In addition to the interviews, we conducted documentary research on the Pedagogical Political Projects of the two institutions, aiming to
analyze possible institutional actions such as training, activities, and curricula that addressed the demands arising from the schooling process of students with visual impairments.

As the study involved interviews with school managers, the research proposal was submitted and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Espirito Santo (Opinion No. 4,212,495). In this sense, we kept the names of the schools and participants involved in the research confidential, ensuring a reserved location for conducting the interviews and freedom for the interviewees not to answer embarrassing questions, proceeding in an ethical and discreet manner during data collection.

To assist in data analysis, we turned to the conception of education by the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci (1999; 2001), who presents it as a means of forming the intellectuals of the subaltern classes to act in the transformation of society. For this purpose, Gramsci criticizes the educational models of his time, based on dogmatic teaching, which is more focused on the professional rather than intellectual formation of students.

In the same perspective, we used the conception of the school manager's role in the educational process by Vitor Paro (2008; 2015) and Saviani (2000) to support our reflections on the importance of this professional in the school environment as a leadership capable of mobilizing the community for their participation in the educational process, in order to build education for the human emancipation of all students.

The gaze and sensitive listening of school managers

As André (1995) tells us, ethnography enables us to "document the undocumented." Through a sensitive gaze, we can truly experience and feel the desires and experiences of the individuals involved. The semi-structured interview was a unique moment to listen and empathize with the involved managers.

During the interview, when asked about their training regarding federal resources from Special Education, allocated to the school, the manager of the state school stated that she had never participated in any training regarding these federal resources and programs. The manager of the municipal school, on the other hand, replied that the training preceding the director election process "addressed the issue of federal funding" (Manager of the Municipal School). However, according to the manager:

I don't remember it being specific, this relationship between funding and Special Education. I don't think it was, I think it was more general, not that
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specific. My knowledge of special education is based on my postgraduate degree in special education (Manager of the Municipal School, our translation).

Thus, it is evident that, although there is training for future managers, it is incapable of meeting Special Education's demands. In an interview, the state school manager responded that the only training she underwent regarding Special Education was a course on Pedagogical Practices focused on Special Education. However, the course was not offered by the education system; it was pursued by the manager's own interest and provided by a private education company. When asked about her conception of the importance of Special Education from an inclusive perspective, she responded that:

[...] Inclusive Education is a necessity, right? We are all subject to it... today, we are capable, and tomorrow, we may experience an illness or an accident and become people with special needs, right? And... we have children, nephews who are also subject to this. So, it's a necessity, but... there's a lot to advance in terms of inclusion, especially regarding teacher training, right... in the issue of the reform of... of higher education courses in teaching, which I still think is... I practically had nothing focused on this public in my training, and I don't believe that over the years, there has been any progress in higher Education and teaching courses. Training teachers because I see it like this: a new group arrives, and when they receive, for example, a student with Down Syndrome, they have no clue how to deal with this group, right... They become totally dependent on having another person in the room, and they cannot handle this diversity alone. They don't know how to adapt materials, adapt their class, it's a reality, not only for public schools but for all, schools need to improve a lot. Inclusion, in fact, doesn't happen (Manager of the State School, our translation).

The training of school managers and even teachers regarding special Education is a challenge and an evident need in the manager's response, who considers it the greatest obstacle to the schooling process for students with disabilities. The issue of teaching courses raised by the manager is confirmed in the research by Caetano et al. (2018), which found that the Special Education discipline in the Pedagogy course at UFES seems to still be used to introduce other knowledge, such as School Inclusion, differences, and diversity in the school and does not address the necessary pedagogical practice for working with this target audience.

However, it is worth highlighting the effort of the managers to "educate themselves," thus understanding this need and the role of the school manager, who is not just an administrator but an educator, committed to transforming the reality of students, as Paro (2015) suggests. When we refer to Special Education, this transformation is even more urgent, as this audience
has long had their rights suppressed. In this same perspective, when asked about her role in the schooling process of visually impaired students, the manager of the municipal school stated:

The director's function is exactly that, mobilizing the people who accompany this student in Special Education. So, when we talk about mobilizing, it involves the family, the teacher, the school management team, and the school staff. So everyone is mobilized to better serve this child, within their specificities (Manager of the Municipal School, our translation).

We can observe the same concern and involvement in the response of the manager of the state school, who recounted her stance regarding the schooling of visually impaired students while working as a teacher and later as a school manager in the same educational institution, saying:

So I am always monitoring, I see them in the classroom, I see them in the hallway, I talk to them. When I go into the classroom and notice that someone is a bit distracted, I say: look, this one needs to sit more in the front - without actually exposing what they have, but I always signal who it is, call them aside to talk, but primarily, which I think is essential, is the Special Education teacher collaborating in the classroom and providing individualized attention afterward and ensuring what their right, adapted materials is. As a manager, I take care of that (Manager of the State School, our translation).

The manager's involvement and understanding regarding the need for this monitoring and support for the school staff to have the necessary resources and support to promote the learning of students with disabilities is evident. Another point worth highlighting is her understanding of the legal right of students with disabilities to have access to an education that meets their specific learning needs. The manager also pointed out her greatest difficulties regarding the schooling of visually impaired students. Below is the excerpt from the interview where we discussed these difficulties:

Manager of the State School: So, our student with visual impairment, I feel the lack of assistance for her here. Since she is the only student, she is accompanied for 10 hours. Ten hours for a school of 40. She spends a lot of time unsupervised. Even though she is not completely blind, she still has physical difficulties, so having a reader with her all the time would be much better.

The report from the manager of the state school clearly highlights the difficulties that visually impaired students face in studying. One point to note is regarding the support for the visually impaired student, which for a weekly workload of 40 hours is insufficient, considering
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the specific needs for her learning, which relate to the production of concrete materials to be used in classes and to assessments that, even with enlarged letters, the student needs someone to describe images, graphs, etc.

In line with Gramsci (2001), teacher training is of great importance for teaching to be meaningful for the student and for the teacher to have ownership of what they are teaching because, without training, the teaching staff and the school will lack the "material corporeality" to teach (GRAMSCI, 2001, p. 44, our translation).

Once again, the absence of educational public policies targeted at visually impaired students is evident. Policies that ensure training for teachers and, possibly, additional planning time so that they have adequate conditions to produce materials, elaborate assessments, and activities that students can develop independently, as well as ensuring students' access to equipment that allows them to follow classes.

The respect and solidarity demonstrated by students in assisting their visually impaired peers were aspects highlighted throughout the entire research. Whenever observed, visually impaired students were surrounded by friends, who frequently reminded teachers to describe images and bring them closer to facilitate students' understanding, helping them in the best possible way to keep up with classes.

Analyzing the official documents of the schools

When analyzing the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) of the Municipal School, it was possible to identify, in the initial part, that the student has the right to learn, and for this, in the school's view, learning contexts must be adapted to the needs and expectations of the student. Promoting learning, cooperation, and solidarity are conditions for overcoming exclusion factors (COLATINA, 2017a).

In line with Cury (2002), every individual has the right to acquire the legacy of education so that they can actively participate in society. Therefore, the school environment must be conducive to ensuring the learning of all students. And when we say "all," we also refer to students who are the target audience of Special Education who, much more than cooperation and solidarity, need to have the right to learn, a right that is intrinsic to every individual, guaranteed not out of pity, but by law. Thus, for exclusion to be overcome, it is necessary for legislation to be upheld.
The raison d'être of the school is the students, as Paro (2015) tells us, the pedagogical practice, or the teaching-learning process, is what will justify the administrative practice. Above all, the school manager must be an educator who is committed to ensuring that all students have access to emancipatory education.

The Institutional Development Plan (PDI) of the school addresses this issue, outlining as its objective the formation of participative, critical, democratic, and emancipatory citizens, endowed with ethical, political, and aesthetic principles, and aware of their rights and duties. The document also adds that the school embraces different knowledge and diversity through intersubjective relationships, based on the emancipatory principle (COLATINA, 2017a).

As Gramsci (2001) presents to us, education, more than content, must offer dignity to students, serving as an instrument of emancipation and a tool for transforming society. This process of human emancipation must be thought out and planned by the school in order to include students with disabilities whose educational process is often reduced to promoting their socialization with other students. The school document also presents us with an academic mission, ensuring a humanized education through Democratic Management and an educational vision based on participatory management, leading the learner to act as a transforming subject in society (COLATINA, 2017a).

Advancing further in the analysis, in the part of the document concerning institutional objectives, it is worth highlighting the objective of "ensuring access and integration of children with special needs in the learning process, valuing diversity as a characteristic of the school community" (COLATINA, 2017a, our translation).

The term "special needs" is no longer being used when we talk about Special Education, precisely because of the breadth to which it refers. Who are the students with special needs? Can we include in this group students with learning difficulties, neurological disorders, psychological problems, in short, a myriad of audiences.

However, when we refer to the recipients of Special Education, we are talking about students with disabilities, global development disorders, and high abilities/giftedness, as defined by the National Policy for Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education in force since 2008 (BRASIL, 2008).

It is worth noting that, during the research, it was noticeable, among the school staff, the difficulty in distinguishing which students constitute this target audience. This identity is essential, even in understanding the educational policies aimed at Special Education, so that the school can plan and devise strategies to meet their needs. It is also worth noting that among the
institutional objectives, none pertained to students with visual impairments, although the school serves this target audience and, for their education, requires specific resources and strategies.

When analyzing the topic of promoting access and retention, we identified the following strategy: "providing opportunities for the participation of students with special needs in school presentations" (COLATINA, 2017a, our translation). Once again, we did not find anything specific referring to students with visual impairments, and the term "special needs" made the strategy somewhat generic.

Moreover, although the participation of students who are recipients of Special Education in all school events is crucial, ensuring their access, retention, and, primarily, learning requires a broader range of actions. As highlighted by Borges (2016), the process of schooling students with disabilities requires the implementation of emancipatory practices, as well as respect for and appreciation of diversity.

Topic 2.11, named "Políticas de Educação Inclusiva" provides an overview of the policies and actions adopted by the municipal education network, including advocating for the right of all students to be together, emphasizing human rights, and promoting citizenship. The topic also prioritizes the adoption of specialized resources, support, and inter-sectoral partnerships, highlighting the importance of the municipality's multifunctional team, formed in 2007, to work with students with disabilities and their families.

It is worth noting the emphasis on clinical care compared to pedagogical care throughout the topic. The multidisciplinary team, for various reasons, such as the scarcity of resources and specialized personnel, has been limited to conducting "screenings" of students referred by schools with learning difficulties or suspected disabilities, in order to refer them to specialists to obtain a medical diagnosis.

The document also addresses student service policies, enumerating mechanisms to stimulate access and retention of students who are recipients of Special Education. Among the strategies are the physical adaptation of the institution, the training of the school staff, partnerships with specialized institutions and the municipality's multifunctional team, and curriculum expansion.

Turning our attention to the documents of the State School, it was observed that the school did not have the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) ready; it was still under construction. Therefore, we analyzed the institution's pedagogical political project. The first point that caught our attention was related to the pedagogical conceptions of the institution.

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1 Inclusive Education Policies.
states that "The market needs individuals prepared to perform types of activities and tasks that define the new forms of work. Meeting this role is challenging for the school" (COLATINA, 2017b, n.p., our translation).

The reason for the existence and work of the school should be to promote the human emancipation of its students. Consistent with Gramsci (2001), the school must balance the formation of the capacity for manual labor and intellectual work because the school is the instrument for forming intellectuals. Problematizing this reflection further, how would students who are recipients of Special Education fare in a school that works to meet the demands of the market? It is difficult to answer this question because the market follows a capitalist and exclusionary logic.

Furthermore, the school's Pedagogical Political Project (PPP) discusses the philosophical precepts of the institution, stating that it is based on the vision of man as a historical being who realizes himself in the world with possibilities to learn throughout his existence and with the right to physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development (COLATINA, 2017b). These precepts align with Gramsci's (2001) conception of education, which advocates for a school focused on a humanistic education. This approach not only conveys the knowledge historically produced by humanity but also empowers students to actively participate in social activity after elevating them to the point of intellectual and practical creation capacity.

In the section of the document addressing the institution's evaluation conception, and specifically regarding students who are recipients of Special Education, we find the following statement:

At any level of education, students supported by specific legislation - the sick, pregnant and/or military, students with special needs, are guaranteed special rights, with alternative forms of fulfilling the workload and assessments that meet the minimum requirements by proportion (COLATINA, 2017b, n.p., our translation).

However, the document does not specify what types of assessments can be offered to these students, with the aim of viewing assessment as a process that seeks to identify students' progress and reflect on their practice. A term frequently used in the document that caught our attention was "quality." At various points, the PPP outlined actions that the school undertakes to ensure the quality of education. Among these points, the institution highlights quality indicators, where the educator's role is to teach and ensure the right to learn.
The document also states that the institution has the duty to teach the student "to deal with freedom, establishing limits" (COLATINA, 2017b, n.p., our translation).

The document also outlines measures that the institution must take to improve the "quality" of education, including: differentiated, innovative, and creative teaching strategies; content recovery; ensuring the right to learn; involving families in the teaching-learning process; efficient planning; adherence to the regulations of the Common Rules of state schools; improving academic performance; and combating repetition (COLATINA, 2017b).

It is worth noting that the term "quality" is quite vague and, depending on how it is used and conceptualized, it can further reinforce the "mercantile rationale" that, according to Paro (2015), has guided public policies and threatened the right to education. The mercantile rationale undermines educational purposes and good educational practices, reducing everything to indices and market interests.

Thus, the school starts working towards improving students' grades in external assessments, as well as reducing the rates of failure to occupy top positions in national rankings. It neglects the student himself, who is a historical-cultural being, who possesses knowledge that often cannot be measured by standardized assessments, which do not take into account the diversity of students' realities and disregard the entire educational process built by the school to promote knowledge.

The PPP of the state school also presents a point entitled Inclusive Education Policy, which cites articles 205, 206, and 208 of the Federal Constitution, which concern the right to access education, the duty of the State to promote and guarantee this right, as well as the values that must be upheld, such as equality. The document also mentions Resolution CNE/CEB No. 4, of October 2, 2009, which establishes the Operational Guidelines for Specialized Educational Assistance in Basic Education, Special Education modality, as the school has a Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) room (COLATINA, 2017b). Regarding the school's actions to promote the schooling of public students in Special Education, the document states that:

The school promotes a socially quality education, that is, an education of opportunities for access and quality of teaching for all students, paying attention to students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, or high abilities/giftedness (COLATINA, 2017b, n.p., our translation).

Once again, the term "quality" is used, but now accompanied by the word "social," in which the school explains that it would be to provide all students, including those in Special Education, access to a quality education. Therefore, I understand that "quality education" entails...
providing access to the knowledge historically produced by humanity, which should be offered to all students, presupposing a non-reduction of the curriculum content to be worked with these students.

Drawing Considerations

From the interviews conducted with school managers, it was possible to identify that one of the main factors hindering schooling, not only for students with visual impairments but for all students in the Special Education audience, is related to the lack of training that provides support not only for teachers' work but also for the ongoing training of school managers in the field of Special Education. During the interviews, the managers mentioned that the Special Education training they participated in was not offered by the school systems where they work but by private companies and colleges, being funded by the managers themselves.

According to the school managers, teachers' training does not meet the needs of these students regarding the expansion of materials, assistance, and production of concrete materials that can facilitate the learning process for these students. It is also worth noting that upon researching the schools, as well as the state and municipal public policies of Colatina, it was not possible to identify a program or even a public policy currently in effect that addresses the training of teachers or school managers regarding Special Education.

However, it is essential to highlight the school managers' understanding of the right to education of students with visual impairments, as well as the awareness that we need to make significant advancements to ensure their access to education with socially referenced quality. I also emphasize the involvement of these professionals in the teaching-learning process of these students, as well as their sensitivity to the problems they face in accessing knowledge.

The analysis of official school documents revealed that Democratic Management is of great importance for the schooling process of students in the Special Education audience. Each student is considered a historical-cultural being and, as such, has the right to access the knowledge constructed throughout history by humanity. To ensure this right, which is guaranteed by legislation, it is necessary for the school to adopt emancipatory practices that involve the entire school community.

Such practices are possible through a profound transformation in human relationships within the educational institution, starting with the construction of a democratic space for participation and the exercise of citizenship. Therefore, we emphasize the role of the school
manager as the facilitator of this process of opening up to the school community and the students.

We emphasize that, in setting a research path, it is understood that the proposed theme will not be exhausted here. A long journey of advocacy and research must be undertaken so that all students with visual impairments can have their right to learn respected and guaranteed by educational systems and networks.

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